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ABSTRACT

Focus of this guide is a project to identify best practices and programs in preparing foster care youth for career opportunities and economic self-sufficiency. Foster care program context is described as an economy characterized by jobs clustering into two categories (high wage positions with a continuing career pathway and low wage entry-level jobs) and the potential to use existing resources in the education, welfare, and social support systems. Previous research identified five key elements of pathways: (1) introduction to career and educational options; (2) preparation for college entry standards; (3) career-related work experience; (4) transition to postsecondary education and career employment; and (5) social supports. Research and analysis of foster care programs and policies found: (1) multiple services (skill building/tutoring, work experience, academic counseling/introduction to college, career counseling, mentoring, scholarships/financial assistance, employment training, transportation); (2) a large potential pool of available yet untapped resources (secondary education, postsecondary education, foster care-specific, other public); and (3) the need for a comprehensive long-term college and career preparation strategy (program development that includes the key elements of pathways, policy development). Descriptions of 11 current foster care programs include summaries of provided services. Three current programs are described that incorporate a program design encouraging continuing movement along a pathway and a connection to a larger system offering supportive resources. (YLB)

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PROMISING PRACTICES:

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SCHOOL TO CAREER AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR FOSTER CARE YOUTH

WORKFORCE STRATEGY CENTER

A GUIDE FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS



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The Workforce Strategy Center is a nonprofit consulting group that helps public- and private-sector leaders throughout the United States create public systems that lead people to high-wage, high-demand employment.

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The center's research identifies practices and policies that put community colleges at the center of regional workforce development systems. It identifies best practices and helps state policymakers, community colleges, community-based organizations, and funding agencies better understand the ways community colleges provide education and training that leads to career progression.

IT CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVES

The center is working with public- and private-sector leaders in San Francisco, the East Bay, San Jose, Los Angeles, and New York City to develop pathways to high-paying, high-growth information technology (IT) careers. In each city, the center brings public agencies, community-based organizations, educational institutions, employers, and public- and private-sector funders together to create a systemic approach to IT workforce development for economically disadvantaged residents.

YOUTH INITIATIVES

The center works with educators and policymakers across the country to develop pathways to college and careers for at-risk and disadvantaged young people by making more effective use of existing workforce development resources. In addition to its work with the initiative on Improving Transition to Adulthood for

Youth Served by the Foster Care System, the center works with Puget Sound PathNet, coalition of community colleges, schools, community-based organizations, and government agencies in western Washington State that develops pathways to college and careers for out-of-school youth. The same type of career ladder initiative has been at work in three other cities: Baltimore, Maryland; Kansas City, Missouri; and Portland, Oregon. Using existing resources, these initiatives reconnect out-of-school youth to education, prepare them to meet college entry standards, and help them get into two- and four-year colleges. The goal is to introduce inner-city young people to opportunities in IT and other high-growth careers.

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PROMISING PRACTICES:
SCHOOL TO CAREER AND
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
FOR FOSTER CARE YOUTH

The Workforce Strategy Center (WSC) was asked by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to identify current best practices and programs in preparing foster care youth for career opportunities and economic self-sufficiency. We were asked to look at effective foster care programs, examine notable models outside the system, and develop key principles and recommendations.

In developing this project, the WSC's work was driven by two objectives. First, to reflect the challenges and demands of today's economy; and second, to ensure programs realize the potential benefits to be gained in connecting with the larger workforce development system. Ultimately this system will be needed to support effective strategies to ensure economic self-sufficiency for foster care youth.

The context for this program is explained more fully in the following pages.

CONTEXT:
NEW ECONOMY

Today's economy is increasingly characterized by what might be called the "dumbbell" or "hour-glass" phenomenon with jobs clustering into two categories:

[1] High wage positions with a continuing career pathway. These jobs in areas such as manufacturing and technology typically require some form of advanced training and skills and offer continuing career opportunities to successful individuals.

[2] Low wage entry-level jobs. These positions found in areas such as the fast growing service sector typically require minimum training, pay low wages, and offer little prospect for career advancement. Recent early data from the welfare to work demonstration shows that, contrary to the belief held by some, entry into these low level jobs does not provide a career ladder into economic self-sufficiency.

Given the structure of today's economy, the WSC believes that effective school to career strategies will require a pathway to high wage, high skill jobs. This pathway calls for some form of postsecondary education and training and connection as well as a direct connection to high wage, high demand skill sectors. Underlying the review and recommendations presented in this report is a preference for program models that can provide the necessary orientation, skills development, and social support to connect foster care youth to postsecondary education and career employment.

CONTEXT:
THE SYSTEM

Prior work by the WSC indicates the potential to use existing resources in the education, welfare, and social support systems to fund needed pathways for foster care and at-risk youth. Given this potential, we set a second objective to seek policies and program models that

made effective use of these resources and resources embedded in the foster care system itself to support needed pathways.

In other work supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Dewitt Wallace-Readers Digest Fund (see www.workforcestrategy.com), WSC has identified five key elements of such a pathway:

[1] Introduction to career and educational options. Many at-risk and disadvantaged youth are simply unaware of the career and education opportunities open to them. Effective workforce development strategy should acquaint students with regional high-wage, high-demand career opportunities as well as needed training and education.

[2] Preparation for college entry standards. High wage jobs across sectors increasingly require post-secondary level training and education. An effective strategy must prepare students for the skill levels to succeed in these programs. For example, most community colleges require a minimum of eighth grade reading and mathematics scores to meet entry standards.

[3] Career related work experience. Research shows that learning is advanced by real-world applications. The need for additional income is also an important issue.

[4] Transition to postsecondary education and career employment. As above, an effective program should help connect youth to needed pre-career skills training offered at community colleges and other industry intermediaries (organizations with close ties to industry that provide industry-approved training and connections to employers).

[5] Needed social supports. National research shows that effective program models offer youth counseling, contact with supportive adults, and other needed support services as an integral part of program operations.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, the WSC reviewed literature on the foster care system and the school to career system and conducted interviews with national foster care and school to career experts, national and state policymakers, and local program operators. We also engaged in regular discussions with Improving Economic Opportunity for Young People Served by the Foster Care System collaborators from the University of Maine Muskie Institute and the Child Welfare League of America as well as with foster care youth themselves,

including Vanessa Jones who assisted in the research for this paper.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After research and analysis of foster care programs and policies, the WSC review has resulted in three key findings: (1) Foster care programs are characterized by multiple services; (2) there is a significant resource base available for support of foster care programs and programs to connect foster care youth to college and career; and (3) there is a need for the development of a long-term and comprehensive college and career program and policy strategy for foster care youth.

1. MULTIPLE SERVICES

Based on our literature review and discussions with national experts we found programs offering a wide variety of education and employment services for foster care youth. In order of frequency these included (see table, page 4):

Skills Building/Tutoring. The most frequent service was skills building/tutoring often provided in partnership with local schools. In general, programs offered tutoring to improve students' basic skills and

to assist them in achieving a GED. By and large, skills building/tutoring programs are not focused on assisting students in meeting college entry standards nor were there many examples of industry-specific skills building. For example, the Transitional Living Program of Kings Ranch in Chelsea, AL provides tutoring for 9- to 19-year-old youths but does not focus on college preparation. The Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA) Program in Norwich, CT does provide tutoring but does not specifically have a college preparation program although they do encourage youths to apply to college.

Work Experience. The second most frequent service was work experience, from job shadowing to community service to internships and paid employment. Work experience programs primarily focused on immediate job opportunities with a lesser emphasis on long-term career employment. A notable example is the Living Classrooms/UPS School to Career Partnership which provides foster care youth with entry-level experience that can lead to career employment. However, the primary intent of this program is to provide a more limited work experience opportunity.

Academic Counseling/Introduction to College. A number of programs place an emphasis on educational counseling and introducing students to specific college opportunities. Casey Family Services' programs in particular provide an introduction to college opportunities, orientation to financial aid, and make specific connections to postsecondary institutions. Casey's program in Hartford, CT, for example, provides an introduction to historically black universities for those youth who are interested. Recognizing the importance of college counseling, some programs with fewer resources, such as the Transitional Living Program in Knoxville, TN, bring in volunteers to work with youth. It should be noted that interviews with a selected group of foster care youth revealed that they are often referred to GED programs and certain "default" colleges by IL staff who may not be particularly knowledgeable themselves about postsecondary options.

Career Counseling. Several of the programs offer generalized career counseling including basic employability skills, connections with mentors, and some discussion of appropriate career options. Few programs, however, appear to specifically target regional high-wage, high-growth opportunities.

A focus on this area represents a potential opportunity for foster care programs to inform and connect kids to growth opportunities.

Mentoring. National experience shows that connection with a caring adult is one of the most effective interventions in youth programming. About half of the programs contacted incorporate mentoring as an element of program operations. One example is the Connections Mentor Program in Mobile, AL which is specifically focused on mentoring. Volunteers are trained to work with participants on independent living skills and assist them with college applications. Activities include: a college shadowing program, a job shadowing program, and assistance in internship opportunities. One issue with the Connections Mentor Program, and likely many others, is difficulty recruiting African American males to serve as mentors and role models.

Scholarships/Financial Assistance. One of the most significant potential opportunities found in the survey is state financial support for college attendance. Currently states including Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and California are providing some form of financial support for students to attend

FOSTER CARE PROGRAMS:
SERVICES PROVIDED

	ACADEMIC COUNSELING/ INTRO TO COLLEGE	SKILL BUILDING TUTORING	CAREER COUNSELING	MENTORING	EMPLOYMENT TRAINING	WORK EXPERIENCE	SCHOLARSHIPS FINANCIAL AID	TRANSPORTATION
Living Classrooms Foundation, Baltimore, MD		☐		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Norwich, CT		☐		☐		☐		
Transitional Living Program, Chelsea, AL	☐	☐						
Child and Family Transitional Living Program, Knoxville, TN		☐	☐	☐				
Connections Mentor Program, Mobile, AL	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐		
Casey Family Services, Long Term Treatment and Foster Care, Portland, ME	☐	☐	☐			☐	☐	
Casey Family Services, Long Term Treatment and Foster Care, Hartford, CT	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Independent Living Program, Kenosha, WI	☐	☐	☐					☐
House of Representative Page Program, Oklahoma City, OK	☐	☐			☐	☐	☐	
Lighthouse Youth Services, Cincinnati, OH	☐		☐			☐		
Residential Youth Services, Arlington, VA	☐	☐	☐		☐			

college. In Texas, for example, under the tuition waiver program, tuition and fees are waived at state-supported colleges and universities. The Texas program is complemented by the PAL Curriculum which provides broad life skills, career, and college planning. In 1997-98, 325 foster care youth took advantage of this policy.

Connecting foster care youth to these state-supported opportunities and leveraging additional public and private funding represents, in our view, one of the most significant potential opportunities for foster care programs. The House of Representative Page Program of Oklahoma is an example of a program that does take advantage of these opportunities linking private sector and public sector dollars to help support students in college. The Casey Family Services programs interviewed also try to make connections to college primarily using available private sector (Casey) resources.

Employment Training. Relatively few of the programs interviewed have formal employment training programs. Most of the employment training is focused on immediate employment open to students with relatively little skills training as opposed to longer-term and more intensive career training of the kind found, for example, through the

PATHNET programs (see page 16). A good example of the kind of employment training offered foster care youth is found through the Living Classrooms/UPS School to Career Partnership which provides a nine-month training leading to employment with UPS. The goal of this training is to provide students with immediate paid work experience which may or may not lead to a continuing career opportunity with UPS. Other programs offered limited connections to immediate employment opportunities, frequently in the service sector.

Transportation. Transportation is frequently cited as an issue in virtually all programs seeking to work with economically disadvantaged participants. The issue did come up in the survey as a concern with a few of the programs including the Independent Living Program in Kenosha, WI.

2. A LARGE POTENTIAL POOL OF AVAILABLE YET UNTAPPED RESOURCES

The WSC in its national research of programs targeted to at-risk and disadvantaged youth has identified several large sources of funding which can support the kind of educational and career pathways experts believe are needed to promote economic self-sufficiency.

Secondary Education Resources. It is no surprise that much of the discussion of policy and programs for at-risk and disadvantaged youth revolves around the question of resources. Those program models that do appear to work are, inevitably, among the most expensive. The increasingly critical need to provide at-risk and disadvantaged youth with access to post-secondary education opportunities can only increase program costs. At the same time, traditional resources for these programs are being cut. Much of the funding that remains is vested in discretionary grant programs such as the Youth Opportunity Group program that will not reach large numbers of youth who need it.

Yet, largely overshadowed in the current debates over traditional funding streams is a much larger "non-traditional" resource: education funding. Through resources at the secondary level and post-secondary level, education dollars can potentially fund program services for out-of-school youth at a scale that exceeds traditional employment and training resources at the height of their funding. Perhaps more important, education funding is more flexible than many traditional resources, can support longer-term programs, and can provide more comprehensive services.

At a time when all youth, regardless of formal school status, require some form of post-secondary education, these resources provide a foundation for communities to create pathways to college for youth at risk, many of whom are in the foster care system.

The foundation for this funding is the more than \$275 billion in federal, state, and local dollars that support public schools—by far the nation's largest resource for education and training. Most communities now spend \$5,000 per student per year or more to finance public education. This funding—and particularly that portion which flows to communities from the state—is also a potential resource for students who have dropped out of school. In the face of growing concern that traditional schools are not adequately serving all youth, a number of states and cities have in recent years allowed education resources to support alternative education opportunities for at-risk and out-of-school students.

Through mechanisms ranging from charter schools to local school board agreements, community-based organizations, community colleges, and other institutions are accessing annual per-pupil allocations ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,500 per year for

development of education programs for at-risk and out-of-school youth. Depending on the particular state and community, this funding can be used to support a broad range of long-term and comprehensive interventions including GED, high school degree and college preparation programs, and, in some communities, post-secondary education. In a number of states and communities, these dollars finance what amounts to an alternative network or system for at-risk and out-of-school youth.

One good example is Portland, Oregon, which uses state per-capita education funding—the dollars that flow to local school districts for each enrolled student—to serve 3,000 out-of-school youth through a network of more than 100 alternative providers. Through re-enrolling these students in the public system—and then contracting service to alternative providers—Portland receives over \$7 million in state funding which would otherwise be lost to the district. This “new” money allows the city to offer out-of-school youth a wide variety of educational options including GED, diploma, and (now in development) post-secondary programs.

Oregon's laws are among the most flexible in the country in allowing

state education dollars to support out-of-school youth in non-traditional school settings. Yet, as a recent National Council of State Legislatures survey attests, there is growing evidence that many, if not most, states will allow some form of education funding to support programs outside traditional schools. The Sar Levitan Youth Network, in work with cities across the country, has identified communities throughout the country that currently use education resources to support alternative programs for out-of-school and at-risk youth.

Although these examples are notable, this is a resource that remains underutilized, even in communities that have funded programs. The Levitan Network has identified opportunities in communities around the country to use currently untapped education resources to expand both the numbers of at-risk and out-of-school students served and the range and scope of services offered.

Post-Secondary Education Resources. A second resource is post-secondary funding. Federal Pell Grants provide up to \$3,000 per student per year (1999–2000) to support post-secondary training and education. Because most programs targeted to foster care youth do not

now include a post-secondary component, Pell Grants are often not seen as a resource for foster care youth. However, in a time when some form of post-secondary education is virtually required for economic self-sufficiency, Pell Grant and other post-secondary funding can help communities increase college access for at-risk and out-of-school youth. Through combining Pell Grant and basic education funding, ambitious communities can create a pathway to college for foster care youth. A number of communities around the country, including Seattle, Portland, and Baltimore, are now seeking to use these dollars to prepare at-risk and out-of-school youth for post-secondary education; connect them to college; and sustain them once there. There is an opportunity to include foster care youth in these and similar efforts.

Foster Care-Specific Resources.

As noted earlier, several states including Massachusetts, Texas, Oklahoma, and Connecticut have targeted resources to support foster care youth in college. Resources include, depending on the state, tuition assistance, assistance with room and board, assistance with living expenses, and subsidy of books and supplies. These resources provide foster care youth with an additional funding base to support

college expenses. More significantly, they can be leveraged with the funding sources described above to underwrite a long-term college pathway incorporating both preparation and support for college attendance.

While there are likely few cases in which these funding streams can fully support all the costs of a college education, their presence provides greater opportunities for foster care youth than other youth lacking private means of support. In most states, however, neither the general pool of educational resources nor the foster care-specific dollars are currently used in this kind of strategic design. At best, in selected programs, foster care dollars are matched with other funding such as Pell Grants to support costs for college education. However, we found few programs that took advantage of the foster care and general public resources to create a longer-term strategy that incorporates college preparation, transition and ongoing support.

Other Public Resources. In addition to education funding, other resources can also be used to support education and training opportunities for foster care youth.

States and communities can, for example, use Welfare-to-Work and

TANF funding to support educational preparation, work experience preparation, and, in some cases, post-secondary education and training for youth in the welfare system. A recent report from the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) notes that TANF represents the largest potential source for education and training funding, that states have a significant surplus of these dollars and that they can be used in a number of ways to support education and career pathways for youth. CLASP also notes that to date this surplus has largely been untapped.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replacing the JTPA system presents another opportunity for foster care youth. A portion of WIA funding will be specifically allocated toward youth services and administered by Youth Council. WIA dollars targeted primarily to the economically disadvantaged can be used to support a wide range of activities including educational preparation, counseling, work experience, and short-term post-secondary vocational training.

The WSC believes there is considerable potential for foster care programs to become part of the larger education and training system and thus have better access to the resources described here.

3. NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE LONG-TERM COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATION STRATEGY

The Workforce Strategy Center found that a number of the programs, particularly the Casey funded efforts, showed evidence of several key components of a comprehensive strategy to prepare foster care youth for post-secondary education and careers. However, none of the programs had developed the kind of long-term, comprehensive program model we believe is required to foster a transition to high-wage careers. Similarly, none of the programs had developed the kind of connections to the workforce development system that are needed to assure program sustainability. Specifically, the WSC found foster care programs need significant assistance and support in both program and policy development.

Program Development. As noted above, on the program side the WSC found a partial base of needed services but no comprehensive strategy that brought together educational and career preparation with necessary social and financial support. In particular, we found a need for programs to emphasize the following key elements of an educational and career pathway strategy:

[1] Introduction to career and educational options. In this area foster care programs primarily focused on an introduction to immediate employment options and, in some cases, the potential for connection to college. Absent, however, is a broader overview that would focus on high-wage, high-demand career pathways and the educational requirements needed to succeed in them. While some programs do offer a fairly wide introduction to regional colleges and universities, this was clearly the exception in preparation strategies.

Recommendation: Programs should incorporate a clearly defined educational and career counseling element, developed either internally or in partnership with an educational institution such as a local community college that offers basic labor market and educational information tied to the regional economy. Programs should also seek to work with youth to develop an individual educational and career plan to ensure participants understand the range of opportunities available and are moving forward to achieve them.

[2] Preparation for college entry standards. We found, virtually without exception, that program educational preparation focused on achievement of the GED as the educational outcome objective for foster care youth. As national research demonstrates, achievement of a GED itself is insufficient; rather, youth should be encouraged to meet entry-level standards for credit bearing course work at local and regional institutions. In practice this means that programs need to developed either internally or in partnership with educational institutions, the capacity for skills development in literacy, numeracy, communication, and basic computer skills. National research in these areas demonstrates that instruction in these areas should be contextualized to high-demand career opportunities.

Recommendation: Programs for foster care youth should incorporate a clearly defined college preparation component that would ensure that youth meet prevailing skills standards for success in postsecondary education and training. This component could be delivered through enhanced or enriched GED programs, or maybe preferably, as a separate educational initiative developed with local community colleges or other educational institutions.

[3] Career related work experience. We found that while many programs offer paid work experience opportunities, few are related to high-wage areas such as information technology, financial services, or diversified manufacturing.

Recommendation: Foster care programs should work with organizations that develop career related internships such as local industry associations, chambers of commerce, schools, and colleges. Many programs primarily established for in-school youth are seeking to develop options for those not connected to the traditional school system. Foster care programs may provide a foundation for these efforts.

[4] Transition to postsecondary education and career employment. Some foster care programs have established connections with local educational institutions to explicitly encourage preparation and transition. These programs are, however, in a distinct minority among those surveyed. Given the demonstrated importance of some form of postsecondary education toward career advancement, the WSC believes that it is critical that foster care programs assist in connecting youth to postsecondary education. This is particularly important in light of the underutilized resources that are available to

foster care youth in some states to support continuing education.

Recommendation: Foster care programs should establish a post-secondary transition strategy as part of program operations. Programs should seek to develop and/or join partnerships with community colleges, school districts, and alternative education providers that are offering preparation and direct transition to college. Foster care programs should also use the individual education and career plan as a tool to connect youth to college opportunities.

[5] Incorporate needed social supports. We found that most foster care programs do include some form of counseling and/or mentoring. There is a need to direct these existing services to support the career and educational pathway discussed above.

Recommendation: Counselors and/or mentors should support a college and career pathways strategy. As foster care youth suggested in a discussion group facilitated by the WSC, counselors and mentors should be specifically trained to provide educational and career information and to direct youth to appropriate resources and opportunities. This kind of assistance should be formalized through an

educational and career-planning process built upon the written plan recommended above.

Policy Development. The WSC found that almost overwhelmingly foster care programs exist and function as independent entities rather than as elements of a larger career or workforce preparation system. Although some programs have individual connections with institutions such as community colleges or school districts, we found little evidence of a comprehensive strategic framework that would link foster care programs with educational and training resources. It may be unrealistic to ask already overburdened foster care programs to develop this range of connections either locally or on a statewide basis. However, virtually every locality or region is seeking or beginning to develop more systemic approaches that could incorporate foster care programs.

Similarly, there are in every state and region significant pools of untapped resources targeted to economically disadvantaged at-risk and out-of-school youth that can support an educational and career strategy for youth in the foster care system. Some of these resources may be difficult for foster care programs to pursue individually. However, foster care programs may

find they can access these dollars through joining local and regional partnerships.

Recommendation: Building connections to the emerging workforce preparation system is a process that varies from state to state and by region. Effectively linking to these efforts will entail a long-term process that will require education of local and state foster care coordinators, developing an understanding of emerging local and regional workforce development systems, and advocacy at all levels of government.

— The National Foster Care Awareness Project should seek to develop an educational program for state and local providers informing staff of the full spectrum of institutional partnership and funding opportunities. On the partnership level, the program should inform foster care providers about opportunities to connect to organizations such as Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), community colleges, alternative education providers, human resources agencies, and school to career partnerships. On the funding side, the effort should similarly focus on the full range of educational and youth development resources. Given the high percentage of foster care youth

who are dropouts or eligible for some form of public assistance, material should particularly emphasize state education, Pell Grant, and TANF dollars.

1. The WSC experience suggests that efforts to build institutional partnerships and link resources are now emerging at local levels and throughout the country. With the establishment of the WIB system and local Youth Boards these efforts are likely to continue. These kinds of strategic partnerships are evolving, often slowly, and vary greatly by scope and quality. There is an obvious need for local foster care programs to inform themselves of regional opportunities and to seek partnerships wherever possible. Specifically, local foster care providers should meet with staff from local community colleges, local WIB Youth Board, and local school districts to assess emerging or existing workforce development partnerships. Program staff should also be prepared to act as advocates within their communities for education and career pathway models that provide long-term education and career preparation and effectively use state and local resources. Where no partnerships exist that build on these principles, foster care

programs should seek to establish pilots or prototypes.

For example, in the absence of any larger initiative a foster care program could directly approach a community college to build a college and career preparation effort supported by state education, federal Pell Grant, and local foster care resources. Foster care programs can also approach other organizations serving educationally and economically disadvantaged youth such as community-based organizations or alternative providers to collaborate in creating new programs.

- At the national level, the National Foster Care Awareness Project (NFCAP) should work with government agencies and research and advocacy organizations to support use of outside federal and state resources to serve youth in the foster care system. For example, the foster care community could work with organizations such as the CLASP which are now seeking to promote expanded use of TANF dollars to support education and career opportunities for disadvantaged youth. Similarly, the organization could approach the Department of Labor's Education and Training Administration to ensure that

foster care youth are included in recently funded Youth Opportunity Grant initiatives. Finally, NFCAP should seek support from foundations to promote education and career Pathways initiatives for foster care youth.

At the state and local level, NFCAP and funders should provide leadership, resources, and assistance to build provider capacity.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT FOSTER CARE PROGRAMS

*(Write ups by Vanessa Jones,
foster care youth)*

CONNECTIONS MENTOR PROGRAM, VOLUNTEER MOBILE, INC., MOBILE, AL

Mentoring: The Connections Mentor Program works with 16- to 20-year-old foster care youth in a program model similar to Big Brothers/Big Sisters. The program is run by contract with the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Students are referred to the program by their social workers and must maintain good behavior in order to participate. The program trains volunteers to work with the youth on independent living skills and to assist them with college applications.

Volunteers are chosen from around the community. They have to be at least 21 years of age. They also have to make the commitment to mentor at least one year. Mentors introduce interested youth to college opportunities through class visits and a shadow program where college students take the kids to their classes and show them around campus.

Work Experience: The Connections Mentor Program includes a job shadowing program where youth have the opportunity to go to different businesses to take a look at the careers they wish to pursue. The mentors also assist the kids in finding internships as well. This helps the kids become more focused on finding a career that is well suited for them. The mentoring program works really well, and is beneficial to the kids that go through the program. However, the only barrier is that there aren't enough black male mentors. Many are afraid of the commitment. There are several African-American male children that need male black role models.

CASEY FAMILY SERVICES, LONG TERM AND TREATMENT FOSTER CARE, PORTLAND, ME

Skills Building/Tutoring: Casey Family Services, Long Term and Treatment Foster Care in Portland,

ME serves children from birth to the age of 23. Youth participating in this program attend school while in foster homes. The program provides tutoring, testing, and the opportunity to attend private school.

**Academic Counseling/
Introduction to College:** The program provides college planning in which Casey guidance counselors work closely with area high schools.

Scholarships/Financial Assistance: Youth who attend college receive financial counseling and assistance.

Work Experience: At the age of 14 or 15, youth can go to a wilderness work project or work prep program. These programs take place usually during the summers. While in high school they have job-readiness programs, and independent living programs as well for preparation for the outside world.

Career Counseling: The program works to help youth determine their career interests in order to gear them in that particular area.

Transportation: A big issue here is transportation. Many of the children don't have a driver's license. Because of the area they are in, there is a very limited bus system. The most effective method has been when foster parents and children work as a team to build a good work history,

and parents provide much needed transportation, and role modeling.

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE
PAGE PROGRAM, OKLAHOMA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN
SERVICES, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK**

Skills Building/Tutoring: This program works with youth between the ages of 16-21. They prepare the kids for college and careers through educational seminars and counseling.

Scholarships/Financial Assistance: The program links private sector and public sector dollars to help support students in college. Participating youth receive support for tuition and other college expenses to attend colleges in Oklahoma. In addition to college support, youth receive independent living grants and state money from Oklahoma Children Services to help with expenses. As a result, fewer students are getting GEDs and more are receiving college diplomas. The program has found that this financial support along with supportive foster parents has worked best for the kids. One issue has been changing the attitudes of youth and foster parents about the value of education.

Employment Training: The program offers work readiness workshops on such topics as how to interview, and resume preparation. The program works closely with Red Lobster to provide job skill training for kids.

**LIVING CLASSROOMS
FOUNDATION/UPS
SCHOOL TO CAREER
PARTNERSHIP,
BALTIMORE, MD**

Work Experience; Employment Training: The program offers 16- to 19-year-old foster care youth job training leading to entry-level employment with UPS. Youth are recruited from foster care group homes in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. The goal is to have 150 youth hired at UPS in the year 2000. Overall facilitation is provided by Living Classrooms with UPS largely responsible for the work experience. A main focus of the program is to help young people deal with real life issues and problems on the job. Funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the State of Maryland supports the program. Living Classrooms plans to extend the partnership to include other

firms such as Marriott and Bell Atlantic.

Scholarships/Financial Assistance: UPS will cover community college tuition costs for participating youth.

Transportation: Funds from the Casey Foundation help to support student transportation costs.

Mentoring: The program is planning to add a one-on-one mentoring component.

The biggest challenge for this program has been motivating and encouraging participants to step up and create higher standards for themselves.

**TRANSITIONAL LIVING
PROGRAM OF KINGS RANCH,
CHELSEA, AL**

Academic Counseling; Skills Building/Tutoring: This program works with 9- to 19-year-olds. The program hires tutors, uses volunteers, and works with teachers at area high schools. For the most part, youth are left to decide for themselves whether or not they want to go to college. Although the program provides counseling, there is very little focus on college advisement.

Employment Training: There is no real training program. Most of the youth are employed at grocery stores.

Transportation: Chelsea is in a rural part of Alabama, approximately 20–25 miles from Birmingham. There aren't many work opportunities because of the rural location. Many kids aren't old enough to drive or don't have licenses.

THAMES VALLEY COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY ACTION, NORWICH, CT

Skills Building/Tutoring;
Mentoring: TVCCA has tutoring and mentoring programs for participating youth, though these programs do not offer much in the way of preparation for college. The emphasis is on building life skills. Youth are split into groups where they tackle different issues such as anger management and negotiation techniques. The program has no college preparation component but youth are encouraged to pursue college. Program staff want youth to put college on their priority list. They do have some volunteers such as college students, and the CHAPP program assists youth with setting up and living in an apartment. The goal of the program is to prepare youth for living on their own.

The focus of TVCCA is to provide a stable environment for the youth. Several come out of mental hospitals; some have been emotionally, physically, and sexually abused. The big issue for the program is getting the youth in the position to know what's best for them. Career preparation is not a big focus, nor is there much youth work. The program encourages participants to focus more on education and feels most of the youth aren't stable enough to work. Many are failing school. The biggest barriers faced by the program include getting youth to do chores and helping them become independent (e.g., learning how to get around the city). Youth usually stay an average of six months. Most of those youth that do work do so at fast food restaurants. The program is trying to look for internships for those youth who express an interest in career occupations. The program does reinforce the importance of college.

CHILD AND FAMILY TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM, KNOXVILLE, TN

This program works with youth ages 17–21 years old. The program has graduate students as well as volunteers from local youth groups and church groups that provide tutoring and mentoring to participating youth.

Career Counseling: The program does have a career assessment component that works with participating youth and lets them know what education and training are required to advance in the careers that they choose. The program brings a student intern from a University of Tennessee program called SafePlace to talk to the youth about different career choices.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM, KENOSHA, WI

Academic Counseling; Skills Building/Tutoring: This program works with 15- to 19-year-olds. They live in group homes and shelters. The program's internal staff provide tutoring for participating youth and advises youth on transition to college, including help with funding. The program currently has no partners. It is a private non-profit organization that receives contracts through county and state initiatives, United Way funds, and grants. While several of the youth complete high school, few go on to college.

Career Counseling: The program offers basic career counseling. They do have individual career planning for those youth that are interested.

Transportation: This organization cited transportation as a big issue in terms of providing stability and keeping children in the same school.

Employment Training; Work

Experience: The program does not provide employment training or develop work opportunities for youth. Most participating youth do work but aren't good at keeping their jobs. The program would like to develop an employment training program to teach job skills and help youth keep their jobs.

**LONG TERM AND TREATMENT
FOSTER CARE, CASEY FAMILY
SERVICES, HARTFORD, CT**

Academic Counseling/Introduction to College: This program places a great emphasis on academics and encouraging participants to go to college. For example, the program provides an introduction to historically black universities for those youth who are interested. Youth receive college counseling in a number of ways. They are advised about college by program counselors and are assisted by education and career consultants in developing a personal educational plan. Foster parents also assist with educational programming. One of the biggest barriers is getting more educational programs into the high school level.

Career Counseling: The education and career consultants who work with the youth help them to identify careers that are best suited

for them. The career counseling is coordinated with college planning so youth end up in colleges that are appropriate for them.

Skills Building/Tutoring: The program provides tutoring and mentoring through an alumni association.

Scholarships/Financial Aide: The program assists youth in paying for college, although it doesn't provide full support. Counselors help youth find grants and scholarships, and the Casey Foundation picks up the rest. The opportunity for college is available to anyone who desires to go.

Employment Training; Work

Experience: The program provides work training for participating youth. It also arranges employment training and work experience with local employers or foster parents. For example, foster parents that are lawyers or actors may participate in a workshop or offer internships related to their specific career.

**LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH SERVICES,
CINCINNATI, OH**

Academic Counseling: Lighthouse Youth Services runs the Ohio PIRC, a Goals2000 Parent Assistance Center. This program aims to increase parents' involvement in their children's education with

services including Parents As Teachers, parent education groups, and education consultation.

Career Counseling/Work

Experience: Most (50–60%) of the youth in Lighthouse's independent living program need to work. The young people in their transitional living program are required to work at least part time in order to stay in the program with their wages going toward rent. Right now there is a labor shortage in Cincinnati so it is not difficult for these youth to find jobs. Lighthouse runs a program called Career Connections which provides transition services for youth with disabilities or chronic health conditions and assists students in special education with their move from adolescent to adult services.

As far as making the connection to postsecondary and career opportunities, this is largely left up to youth who are self-motivated. It is difficult for the program to work with youth on the transition to college since most participants leave the program when they're 18 and a half. The focus tends to be on shorter-term solutions such as getting a GED and a job.

RESIDENTIAL YOUTH SERVICES, ARLINGTON, VA

Academic Counseling: This long-term residential program for homeless kids age 18–21 has a strong counseling component that may touch on academic advisement but primarily focuses on life skills, employment, and parenting for teen mothers. Counselors are involved in local schools and receive weekly reports on each student, attend parent conferences, etc. There is no formal connection to colleges, though counselors and staff try to be resourceful in making connections where possible.

Career Counseling: Much of this component is focused on helping youth get jobs rather than on long-term career planning.

PROGRAM MODELS AND BEST PRACTICES

A number of current programs and initiatives offer models for the foster care system. Each of the efforts described here incorporates a programmatic design that encourages continuing movement along a pathway, and a connection to a larger system that offers supportive resources.

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF LEARNING (AUSTIN, TEXAS)

The American Institute of Learning (AIL) is a non-profit education, employment and training program for young people who have not succeeded in traditional settings. In addition to traditional GED certification, AIL offers career related education opportunities and a connection to Austin Community College. The program envisions itself as a base from which young people can advance to AA degrees and other post secondary credentials through making a direct transition to community college programs. The program provides individual self-paced instruction and offers a broad range of supportive services.

AIL draws support from a variety of sources including foundation aid and several public resources. Most notably, as a dropout recovery center and formally designated Charter school, the program draws down state education resources of approximately \$4,500 per student per year, which provides a continuing and self-sustaining funding source.

AIL offers a model to foster care programs in the long-term educational model it has developed; in its connections to other institutions such as the community college; and in its ability to support itself

through state education resources, an existing and frequently underutilized public funding source which can underwrite programs for at-risk and dropout youth as well as in-school students.

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION

The California Community College Foundation (CCF) employs federal funding to operate the Independent Living (IL) program for foster care youth. The CCF views the transition to community college as a critical one for foster care youth, and has structured its independent living program to promote the connection. IL classes are held on a community college campus, with the college operating companion classes to promote college preparation and readiness. Foster care participants are encouraged to view community college as the next step in an educational/career progression.

CCF provides a model to programs in using foster care resources to promote educational advancement, as well as a connection to a mainstream institution that can provide a gateway to a higher paying career. The close linkage developed with community colleges also helps to leverage public funding, like Pell Grant resources, which are an

entitlement for economically disadvantaged youth and adults. Although open to all who meet basic economic and educational qualifications, Pell Grants are often not seen as a resource by foster care programs.

PATHNET

The Puget Sound Pathways Network (PATHNET) is a regional collaboration of school districts, community colleges and community-based organizations created to foster a comprehensive system to serve out-of-school and at-risk youth. The partnership includes six community colleges, two regional school districts, basic skills learning centers and a multitude of community-based organizations covering three counties (King, Snohomish and Pierce) in the Puget Sound region of Washington. The goal of the collaboration is to create pathways to lead the region's out-of-school youth through post secondary education and into high-growth, high-wage career clusters including information technology, diversified manufacturing and health.

The program is designed on the Pathway model with out-of-school youth entering through community-based organizations and county-

operated basic skills centers and advancing through post secondary education to career-track employment. To foster student advancement along this continuum, PATHNET will provide a wide spectrum of services including college and career orientation, basic skills development, college preparation, counseling, mentoring, paid work experience, financial assistance and a direct transition to career programs at participating community colleges.

PATHNET will be supported through drawing down continuing public funding streams. These include currently untapped state education funding for students who have left the school system (approximately \$4,500 per student per year) Pell Grants and WIA funding. The program has been designated by the WIA youth council as the basis for the evolving King County system for out of school youth.

PATHNET represents one of the most fully developed initiatives for serving disadvantaged youth. The effort is built on Pathway principles; region-wide is systemic in its institutional partnerships; and effective in leveraging nearly the full spectrum of available public funding. Initiatives of this kind are a ready-made opportunity for foster care

programs to provide continuing education and career advancement to foster care youth through linking with the larger system rather than remaining as isolated programs.



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